

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
TAXI CAB COMMISSION
MINUTES: FULL COMMISSION MEETING
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2007

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Interim Chairperson: Doreen E. Thompson, Esq.
Commissioners: William Henry Carter IV,
Thomas E. Heinemann,
Stanley W. Tapscott

Acting General Counsel and Secretary: Marceline D. Alexander, Esq.

A. CALL TO ORDER, MOMENT OF SILENCE & DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:

Interim Chairperson, **Doreen E. Thompson**, called the meeting to order at 10:45AM. Following a moment of silence, the Chairperson introduced, **Marceline D. Alexander**, who is detailed from the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia to assist the Commission with legal matters. **Marceline D. Alexander**, Acting General Counsel and Secretary, conducted a roll call and determined that there was an insufficient number of members of the Commission present for transacting any business requiring a vote.

B. COMMUNICATION FROM THE INTERIM CHAIRPERSON WITH COMMENTS FROM COMMISSIONERS & THE PUBLIC:

1. FORMAT OF THE AGENDA AND OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Interim Chairperson, **Doreen E. Thompson**, inquired whether everyone had a copy of the Agenda. She further indicated that the public has an opportunity to comment on items as indicated on the Agenda and that the Agenda follows the format required in the Commission's rulemaking, which has a specific section for public comments.

2. COMMISSION AND SUB-PANEL MEETING SCHEDULE

Interim Chairperson Thompson stated that the Commissioners have indicated an interest in resuming meetings of the Commission's panels. Currently, the Commission is organized into two (2) panels, the Panel on Rates and Rules and the Panel on Consumer and Industry Concerns. Both Panels' meetings will be held on February 21, 2007 at 9:00 a.m. sic [and 11am], and are open to the public.

3. ZONE MAP

Interim Chairperson Thompson discussed the Department of Transportation's (DDOT) new taxi zone map, which was distributed to the audience. According to Interim Chairperson Thompson, this map is one of Mayor Fenty's one hundred day initiatives and does not change the zones. Rather, it attempts to place the zones in a true north-south orientation and includes more landmarks to make it more helpful to passengers, visitors and

residents. **Interim Chairperson Thompson** reiterated that the new zone map is a DDOT recommendation to the Commission. The Taxicab Commission's zone map is an official rule-making document, which appears in Title 31 of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (DCMR) and any changes to it would have to be made by panel recommendation (Panel on Rates and Rules) and brought before the full commission for its determination.

COMMISSIONERS AND PUBLIC COMMENTS:

a. **Mr. Alonzo Broadus** stated that he thought that the DDOT recommended new map was better than the Commission's current zone map. **Commissioner Tapscott** asked **Mr. Broadus** if he could locate zone 3b on the DDOT recommended new map, but Mr. Broadus was unable to do identify the zone from the information contained in the map.

b. **Tsegaye Tadesse**, a Yellow Cab Company taxi driver, stated that he did not see a difference between the DDOT recommended new zone map and the Commission's official map. He also asked why anew zone map was issued. **Interim Chairperson Thompson** responded that the map is one of Mayor Fenty's one hundred days action plan. The new zone map plugs in landmarks such as Union Station, the U.S. Capitol, the Washington Monument and the White House. The idea behind the map is to have a map that is a little more customer friendly. While the Commission's official zone map is a blow-up of all the zone boundaries, if you are new to the city, it does not necessarily orient you as much to a north-south boundary or give you a layout of the city.

c. **Mr. Tadesse** then asked whether the Fenty Administration had taken a position for or against meters. **Interim Chairperson Thompson** responded that the Administration had not communicated a position to her, but federal legislation requires that the Mayor make a decision on meters at some point. According to **Interim Chairperson Thompson**, the Mayor has to affirmatively make a decision not to go with meters.

4. PRE-LICENSING EXAM

Interim Chairperson Thompson stated that she receives at least one question a day on this issue. She added that one of the first things she did after being appointed Interim-Chair was to revitalize the Education Committee [Advisory Task Force]. Some of the issues which this group is addressing are process issues such as: going through the 300 or more initial questions that need to be updated; addressing how the written and oral sections test will be administered; and addressing the University of the District of Columbia getting in touch with the host (education institution) to get the computerized portion of the test operational.

COMMISSIONERS AND PUBLIC COMMENTS:

a. **Mr. Jeffrey Charles** asked whether folks who took the written test over two years ago would be given some form of amnesty. According to **Mr. Charles**, people like him had done everything that had been asked of them in the past and still have not received anything. **Interim Chairperson Thompson** stated she understood exactly what he was saying and in her opinion something should be in place that does not penalize persons who had taken the taxicab driver's training course some time ago. While she did not believe amnesty was necessarily the appropriate means to accomplish this objective, instituting a free refresher course may be a better alternative. She indicated that persons who took the pre-

licensing training course and received a certificate of completion would be individually notified of the re-opening of the pre-licensure testing and there will also be public announcements.

b. **Mr. E.J. Chubbs and Mr. Yitbarek Syrum** asked whether the pre licensing testing was for new licensees or for drivers seeking to renew their licenses. **Interim Chairperson Thompson's** responded that the Commission was not requiring pre-licensing testing for those persons seeking only to renew their licenses.

5. GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY METER STUDY

Interim Chairperson Thompson indicated that the George Washington University (GW) study, which examines the revenue impact of installing meters in District licensed cabs, was back at the Commission for its review. The Commissioners will need to examine the study and determine whether there are additional questions that need to be answered.

Commissioners Comments:

a. **Commissioner Tapscott** stated that the Meter Study was orchestrated by former Chairperson Causten Toney not the Taxicab Commission and that the Commissioners knew very little about the Meter Study until it was presented to them. He further stated that Mr. Toney selected the people to do the Study, put the Study in effect and the Commissioners had no input until the Commission got the Study back from GW. While he understands that an important part of the Study is to come up with a fare structure where drivers will not lose money, he believes drivers will lose money under this Study. He cited as an example, the difference in fare he would receive if the meter system were in place for travel from Capitol Hill Suites to Union Station. He asked **Interim Chairperson Thompson's** position on the Study. Specifically, whether she was pushing the Meter Study or going to allow it to fall by the wayside.

b. **Interim Chairperson Thompson** responded that this was an issue that could be discussed among the Commissioners, and since the existence of the study has been made public and people have inquired about its outcome, the Commission should complete it. If there are issues or there is something flawed in the Study Report, these could be addressed in the comments, footnoted or clarified by GW. She also stated that she has glanced over the most recent Study Report and feels that it does not draw any conclusions as to whether the District of Columbia should have meters or not. Rather, the Study Report simply takes data and analyzes it.

c. **Commissioner Carter** stated that he feels the Study gives the Commission two or three options to consider. It calculates fares in sixths, eights and tenths of a mile distances. He further indicated that while he does not know how people were selected to use the meters or the criteria used by GW, the Study is not complicated but rather just takes raw data and analyzes it. He further indicated that the Study in itself tells nothing that the Commission does not normally know and understand, but there are some things in the Study about which the Commission has very serious concerns.

d. **Commissioner Heinemann** offered several observations

about the Study. First, the study basically is an analysis of the distribution of the number of taxi rides, trips, and the basic length of trips. Second, as it was originally presented to the Commission, the Study had a number of problems that needed to be fixed. Although some adjustments were made, the Study really did not have the depth of analysis needed by the Commission especially, in the analysis of short trips. Consequently, the Commissioners asked GW to take another look at the meter analysis to try to get it to the point where it is as close to or equal to the fares one would get on a the same short trip under the zone system.

Public Comments:

a. **Alonzo Broadus**, a taxi driver, expressed discontent with the treatment of drivers, stating that drivers are treated like dogs. He recounted that, in the past, taxicab companies taught drivers how to get a face and Metropolitan police officers administered exams not the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). He also asked why UDC should administer examinations. As to meters, **Mr. Broadus** stated that he obtained 1400 signatures of drivers in one month's time from cab driver's, passengers and other cabs which state they do not want meters. He further stated that he gave these signatures to former Mayor Williams and George Crawford, but they were thrown in the trash. **Mr. Broadus** also stated that Former Chairperson Toney had gone all over the city in an effort to get people to say they wanted meters. According to **Mr. Broadus**, this effort, while unsuccessful, is represented by Mr. Toney's act of deliberately taking the fares off the map. **Mr. Broadus** also predicted that if someone called for mileage on a trip from 16th and K Street, N.W. to Georgia Avenue, they would get the wrong answer because people do not how to calculate mileage. He urged the Commission to put the decision back in the hands of the drivers and customers who ride.

b. **Mr. E.J. Chubbs**, driver of independent number 69, observed that every year or so the meter issue is raised. He stated that study after study has been conducted and megabucks are spent. He asked for clarification on what the study actually said; and whether the GW study was just for the Commission or whether drivers were going to have some input on Mayor Fenty's decision on meters. Mr. Chubbs also questioned whether the public would be given an opportunity to discuss the study with the Commissioners before a recommendation was sent to the Mayor. In response, **Interim Chairperson Thompson** stated that the Commission would seek to provide input into Mayor Fenty's decision. She further indicated that any recommendation from the Commission would include recommendations and findings from old and new studies as well as input from the public. **Interim Chairperson Thompson** reiterated that the GW study was not yet a public document.

c. **Yitbarek Syume** stated that he participated in the GW study as a driver and most of the passengers stated that they liked to see how much they pay. He said that there are problems in Zone one because the money is less. He acknowledged having problems calculating fares at times using the zone map.

6. AVAILABILITY OF LIST OF FINAL AMENDMENTS

Interim Chairperson Thompson urged the drivers to take copies of the updated list of the Commission final rulemakings [2004-2006] from the area immediately outside the office. The Commission's website will also be updated to reflect the final rulemakings.

c. OTHER COMMUNICATION FROM THE PUBLIC - HANDICAP ACCESSIBLE SERVICES:

Ms. Lois Thibault, appearing on behalf of a friend and coworker, Dennis Cannon, who lives in Takoma Park and uses a power wheelchair, stated her concern that there are no power wheelchair accessible cabs in the District's fleet to serve persons using power wheelchairs. The Taxicab Commission's rules prohibit using an out-of city cab company for service within the District unless prior arrangements are made through the Commission during office hours. **Ms. Thibault** urged the Commission to change this rule to make it easier for power wheelchair accessible cab services from Virginia and Maryland to provide services within the District of Columbia for people with disabilities.

Commissioners and Public Comments:

1. **Interim Chairperson Thompson** responded that the Commission, through its Panel on Rates and Rules, would take a look at what could be done to make this service more accessible to persons with disabilities. Particular emphasis of the Panel will be on exploring how to make this service available without requiring that pre-arrangements be made through the Office of Taxicabs.

2. **Commissioner Heinemann** observed that that one of the challenges the Commission faces is determining how to build incentives for District of Columbia operators to have a fleet that has wheelchair accessible components to it.

3. **Commissioner Tapscott** also observed that the cost of obtaining additional insurance may be a contributing factor to this problem. He stated that there is nothing that prohibits drivers from obtaining additional insurance and providing services to persons with disabilities.

4. **Yitbarek Syume** challenged members of the Commission to study the state of taxicab services in the District so that the level of service provided is as competitive as the services offered by companies like Barwood and Red Top.

d. ADJOURNMENT AND NEXT MEETING

Interim Chairperson Thompson adjourned the meeting at 12:15PM and announced that the next meeting of the full commission will be on Wednesday, March 14, 2007 at 10:00 AM.